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ABSTRACT

While it is clear that this is an era of global interdependence, the ideology of single language learning persists in the United States. We need to re-examine the view that learning a particular foreign language satisfies global communication needs. It is not sensible to have students spend hundreds of hours studying one foreign language and culture. Esperanto or another easily learned, transcendent language should be internationally adopted and stressed in schools around the world, for all students to learn. Important professional associations in education should begin to study this need, individually and collectively. Leaders and policymakers should support general instruction in a viable, transcendent language through the allocation of federal resources. Theorists must consider the implicit discrimination in the use of only a few selected national languages, and foreign language teachers at all levels should re-examine their attitudes about a planned, artificial, neutral, transcendent language. Finally, schools need to expose prospective teachers and administrators to artificial language, make clear the value of such languages, and encourage them to acquire competency in a transcendent language. (MSE)

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AMERICAN EDUCATION AND GLOBAL INTERDEPENDENCE

ON THE NEED FOR A TRANSCENDENT LANGUAGE

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AMERICAN EDUCATION AND GLOBAL INTERDEPENDENCE

ON THE NEED FOR A TRANSCENDENT LANGUAGE

Norman J. Bauer, Ed.D.

October 3, 1987

"Continued emphasis on French and the widespread introduction of it with official blessing and support must surely be one of the greatest educational blunders of this age." (1)

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"A tool is seldom missed save when you want it and it isn't there. We seldom miss language, because it is so readily available. It is only when we find ourselves faced with someone whose linguistic tool does not mesh with ours that we become acutely conscious of language." (2)

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"La inteligenta persono lernas esperanton, la lingvo universala, raide. Esperanto estas la moderna, kultura, neutrala lingvo por generala interkomunikado. La lingvo estas la simpla, fleksebla, praktike solvo de la problemo de globa interkompreno." (3)

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Introduction

Thirty years ago this month the Russians launched Sputnik and the age of global interdependence mushroomed at a dizzying pace. No longer were any nations to be seen as isolated entities in our global milieu. Each, regardless of size or location, was destined inexorably to be woven into a fabric of connections with each of the others. As events occurred in different areas of the world it became increasingly clear that they often had ramifications around the globe.

The economic world, for example, as George Shultz recently pointed out, (4) has become vastly different during this period of time. Tourism and travel abroad have flourished and there is no sign of any let up in sight. With the advent of telestar and the proliferation of dish-type antennae we have entered into a truly

interdependent world in terms of communicating with one another. We are becoming aware of the recent suggestions of Governor Mario Cuomo that President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev have a televised "grand dialogue" on nuclear arms issues which could be transmitted to both countries. "Everybody," Cuomo has suggested, "would tune in... every set in the world that could reach it would tune in." (5)

Other ventures such as those sponsored by the Semantha Smith Foundation, student exchanges in the lower schools and in higher education, adult exchanges such as the one which was held in Chautauqua during the past summer when 250 Russian citizens visited that historic adult education center, world-wide events such as "We Are the World" held in Africa several years ago in which twenty-five leading stars donated their time and talents to a program designed to obtain money to fight hunger in Africa, the "world bull market" which, according to some economists has fueled the sharp rise in the stock market during the past five years (6), and world-wide travel by people from many countries suggest and support the conclusion that we are, indeed, living in an era of global interdependence.

Despite the empirical basis of this inference, we continue to be saddled in our country with the ideology of single language learning. This tradition, of course, can be traced to a number of significant recommendations which have been largely accepted and which have guided our educational thought and practice during the past hundred years. Those responsible for the report emanating from the Committee of Ten in 1892, for example, stressed the need for high school youth to learn a modern and not a classical language. In mid-century James Conant stressed the need for learning a second language. More recently, the educational reform reports, including the Carnegie Report and the Paideia proposal of Mortimer Adler, have been uniform in their stress on the need for high school youth to study a modern foreign language. In my own state of New York the Board of Regents has adopted in the past three years a policy which stipulates that any student desiring a Regent's Diploma (considered by many in the state to be more prestigious than a locally

approved diploma) must successfully complete three years of study in one foreign language. Somehow each of these groups and individuals failed to grasp the significance of our emerging global interdependence in terms of its linguistic implications. They continued to be governed by a dogma which is lacking in a compelling vision about what ends ought to guide the design of school language curricula to bring schooling in line with our rapidly emerging world-wide interdependence.

On the one hand we should not be surprised by these developments, for tradition has always played a heavy hand in the way in which schools adjust to cultural and technical changes. Somehow, as Leonard has pointed out, "once categorized, all things, whether literally buried or not, are set in a sort of perceptual concrete... any event or trend which doesn't fit into one or another of the departments is assumed not really to exist." (7)

Take, for instance, the failure of our lower schools to incorporate the use of the hand-held calculator in the teacher of arithmetic, thereby making it as integral a part of the early arithmetic training as the arithmetic textbook; or consider the video tape cassettes which have proliferated during the past fifteen years and the potentiality they offer us radically to change the design and implementation of instruction (one powerful teachers union has insisted that video tape never be permitted to be used in classrooms without a full-time, certified teacher present); or the suggestion that computers in the classroom are only good for drill, but that for conceptual development they ought not be employed; or simply the notion that for solid intellectual development to occur certified teachers must be present. Each of these ideological orientations is the result of an earlier tradition which has become reified, extremely resistant to the advent of any newer technologies.

We seem to be living very much as the prisoners in Plato's den, irritated and pained by the new technologies, persistent in our refusal to become enlightened, regularly returning to illusions which have governed our thinking in the past. We seem, as a consequence, to be very much in line with the conservative stance

of William Buckley who has argued that "all that is finally important in human experience is behind us; that the crucial explorations have been undertaken, and that it is given to men to know what are the great truths that emerged from them. Whatever is to come cannot outweight the importance to man of what has gone before." (8)

Clearly in line with this traditional view has been a deeply entrenched linguistic theory strongly supported by language instructors and curriculum designers which says there are many opportunities for one so inclined to employ a particular foreign language including television, movies, newspapers, journals, visits with native language speakers, letter exchanging, foreign travel, all largely the product of our twentieth century civilization. Hence, the stock answer of curriculum makers, language instructors and educational policy makers to the question of foreign language instruction is "Learn a Particular Foreign Language." Clearly that has been the answer in New York and I suspect it has been the response in most other states throughout the country. But this is precisely the response we have been mired in for one hundred or more years. It is a response which is not adequate to the world in which we currently live, nor is it going to be adequate for the world we will be entering in just thirteen short years. We are rapidly becoming a totally integrated world, one large city-state with metropolitan regions throughout the world.

In such a world it becomes increasingly vital that we possess the ability to communicate with people everywhere. But, no one can be expected to learn all the natural, national languages used in these areas. Given the fact that there are between 2,700 and 3,000 languages, not including the hundreds and dialects within each language, throughout the world, it would take hundreds of lifetimes for one to master these languages. Clearly this is not possible, and, with the world's political, cultural, economic, military and leisure activities continuously becoming more integrated, we can no longer consider the stock response "learn a particular foreign language" to be adequate. Indeed this sort of normative position ought to give each of us reason for concern.

Is another response conceivable? Pei suggests there is when he claims that the "answer to the language question can only be integrated global one." (9)

Purpose and Basic Assumptions

This brings me to the primary reason why I have constructed this paper, a reason related to the need to build an integrated world, one resting on peace, brotherhood, and understanding among people who are on an equal linguistic footing everywhere in the world. We need, in other words, to consider the creation of policies related to language instruction which will have the likely long-term consequence of humanizing our world.

It is necessary that I stress at the same time that my purpose is NOT to speak disparagingly about, or denigrate current efforts to teach particular foreign languages in our schools. Nor is my purpose to teach elements of a transcendent language or even to advocate a particular universal language (though I shall mention one such language later in this paper).

In effect I am solely interested in raising to the level of our consciousness a taken-for-granted view of our world, a view which argues that learning a particular language satisfies the needs of our emerging contemporary world.

Several basic assumptions guide my thinking about this matter. (1) It is nonsensical for students to spend hundreds of hours studying a particular foreign language. Indeed, requiring such study of our students may be perceived 100 years hence as the largest blunder of our educational efforts during the twentieth century; (2) We are all members of one humankind, we all possess linguistic capacities that are very largely the same regardless of our national origin, and we all possess the intellectual power to learn an artificial, constructed language; (3) Our world is rapidly and inexorably being woven into a universal human community by the use of technology in a way which precludes the possibility of anyone anywhere ever again living in an isolated region.

I realize just how uncomfortable several of these assumptions may appear to many, and how necessary it is for me to clarify my reasons for accepting them.

Particularly I need to point out that they in no way imply that the acquisition by anyone of another particular foreign language besides one's own national language is not worthwhile. Indeed, my thinking about the matter of the need for a transcendent global language clearly leaves the door open for the acquisition of a particular foreign language by those who have the bent and the inclination to do so. What is of importance, however, and this we must firmly keep in mind, is the need for ALL members of our integrated human race to acquire the ability to communicate with one another naturally and efficiently wherever they find themselves.

What is Needed?

Bacon, it seems to me, identified the problem we confront many years ago when he argued that a "... great cause of ignorance is the want of ideas we are capable of. As the want of ideas, which our faculties are not able to give us, shuts us wholly from those views of things which it is reasonable to think other beings, perfecter than we, have,... so the want of ideas I now speak of keeps us in ignorance of things we conceive capable of being known to us ..." (10)

In other words, we need to develop a compelling vision about the changed nature of our world, its interdependency, and the need to enhance the freedom and dignity of each of its inhabitants by providing them with the ability to speak with one another. This is not only a need in terms of schools and societies, it is increasingly becoming a RIGHT of humans everywhere. To deny any human access to dialogue with another human being anywhere in the world is to keep some humans in varying states of oppression.

The work of Freire, of Giroux, of Bowers, of Apple, has introduced us to the significance of language as one form of oppression in a society. Freire in his classic PEDAGOGY clearly reveals this discriminatory power of language when he states that "... another radical need: that of men as beings who cannot be truly apart from communication, for they are essentially communicative creatures. To

impede communication is to reduce men to the status of "things" and this is the job for oppressors..." (11)

We must remember, too, as Leonard pointed out in his TRANSFORMATION, that "men have walked on the moon because of a compelling vision, but also because of close attention to detail. Those with a vision of a larger change (in our case a vision of a change which would emphasize the acquisition by all students of a second, transcendent language) can't afford to forget that something as awesome as the 'transformation' begins with the way you stand and walk and breathe." (12) Clearly, as foundations scholars we need to reflect critically on the need for a universal capacity to engage humans everhwhere in dialogue. Additionally we need to consider in our thought and writing ways in which such a universal language might become adopted and pursued. Otherwise we stand to be on the side of 'linguistic apartheid,' just as oppressive and crushing as the problem of racial apartheid. We must recognize, as Karol Wojtyla (Roman Catholic Pope John Paul II) so correctly asserted during one of his addresses on his recent tour of the United States, that "we all belong to one human family, and are meant to walk and work together in mutual respect, understanding, trust and love." (13)

It is necessary, too, that we take seriously the need for communicative competency so articulately and forcefully developed by Habermas and later by Bowers. If communicative competence were to become the dominant goal of public schooling that seems so vital in an increasingly integrated and frequently politicized world, our next task would be to consider the implications of this goal for curriculum design and instructional practice. We would want to keep in mind the meaning of communicative competence which, as Bowers stipulates, "can be understood most simply in terms of the individual's ability to negotiate meanings and purposes instead of passively accepting the social realities defined by others." (14) Granted, Bowers was directing his thought at the bureaucratic structures dominating institutions in the United States; with but a bit of extension we can carry his thinking over to the world scene and keep it very much intact.

ESPERANTO - A Political Transcendent, Communicative Language

More than 250 efforts have been made by various scholars to construct an artificial, global language. Referred to by different writers as universal, artificial, constructed, interlanguage, and transcendent, these languages all have in common their neutrality in terms of connection with any one culture. Their purpose has been to enable people everywhere in the world to gain ease of access to one another via dialogue. Of these many efforts, the language which has maintained its existence and continues to remain viable and growing in significance throughout the world, has been that of ESPERANTO.

Created in 1887 by Dr. Ludwig (Ludwik) L. Zamenhof, a Polish oculist (15) and pioneer student of the psychology of international relations, it was intended for use as an international second language. The number of its speakers today is variously estimated from a low of 100,000 (16) to as high as 8,000,000 (17) around the world, making it the most significant of the international artificial languages that have been developed.

The efforts of Zamenhof were received at first with ridicule and criticism, especially the thought that a language might be constructed which would pierce the language barrier that separated people from one another. About the time the language was beginning to catch on, we had World War I, followed closely by the world-wide depression of the 30's and World War II. Because of these traumatic events the value of the language was buried beneath other seemingly more significant issues. Nonetheless it continues to grow and remains a dynamic, active language today. Witness the fact that 6,000 Esperantists from as far away as Brazil and Japan joined together in Warsaw during the final week of July, 1987, to honor Zamenhof on the occasion of the 100th birthday of his language. (18)

Zamenhof's purpose in creating this language was not to replace any natural national language in existence, or to stress Esperanto as a first language, but rather to create a second linking language between natural ethnic languages. It

was to be, he argued, a neutral language, one which would provide an equal, non-political means available to all of humankind for gaining a wider understanding of the various cultures throughout the world, one which would provide an 'umbrella' language under which the plurality of as many as 3000 languages could flourish and develop. Some experts argue that this is one of its greatest strengths. (19)

Dillinger stresses the fact that Esperanto is easy to learn. (20) With a small number of root words, endings, and affixes, one can build a genuinely large vocabulary, a vocabulary which is pronounced the same all over the world. Over half of its words, for instance, resemble English so closely as to be easily recognized; e.g., abrupta, abrupt; absoluta, absolute; acida, sour; adapti, to adapt, etc.

After years of experiment in devising Experanto Zamenhof published in rapid succession an expository textbook entitled Lingvo Internacia (1887) and Dr. Esperanto's International Language (1889). Following this he developed and tested Experanto by translating a large number of works, including the Old Testament, Hamlet, Andersens Fairy Tales, and plays of Moliere, Goethe and Gogol. Then in 1905 he published Fundamento de Esperanto (Basis of Esperanto), the book which has remained the core of Experanto every since, having gone through its 17th edition in 1979. (21)

In the introduction to Fundamento Zamenhof stressed the fact that one condition above all others was most necessary for sustaining Esperanto: "the existence of a cleary defined, never to be touched and never to be changed Basis (Fundamento) of the language... (he was very clear about his insistence that) no person and no society may have the right to make even the smallest arbitrary change in the Basis!" (22)

Over seven thousand books have been published in this language, over a hundred periodicals circulate regularly, and the library of the British Esperanto Association in London contains over 3,000 registered items of Esperanto publications.

Values Which Could be Cited to Justify the Use of ESPERANTO as a Transcendent Language

There are a number of reasons why Esperanto ought to be given serious consideration as a transcendent second language to be learned by all students throughout the world. Clearly it enables people everywhere to communicate with one another, thereby enhancing the likelihood of humanizing people by providing easy, efficient access to common thoughts. Clearly this could be a tool for uniting peoples of all nations, providing what might be the finest means available for achieving lasting peace on the earth. In addition, it has the more immediate likely consequence of enabling business persons to function increasingly effectively wherever they might find themselves.

Research has indicated that learning Experanto can be a splendid preparation for other, more difficult languages. (23) It might also pay a significant role in the economy of education in that it could in many instances indicate to students whether they have language aptitude and the capacity to handle further work in a language. Experts point out that Esperanto is easy to learn, perhaps being five to ten times as fast as any other language.

A good example of how easy it is to read Esperanto can found in the following: "La inteligenta persono lernas esperanton, la lingvo universala, raide. Esperanto estas la moderna, kultura, neutrala linguvo por generala interkomunikado. La lingvo estas la simpla, fleksebla, praktika solvo de la problemo de globa interkompreno." (24)

One needs to qualify the notion of ease however, for just as with all languages, even five years of study of Esperanto can leave one with much to learn. Firth points this out candidly when he reveals the results of his own experience: "Esperanto is not all that easy and five years of study would come nowhere near exhausting its scope." (25) (Still, it should be mentioned that after five years of study of a particular foreign language, French, when he went to Paris he was almost helpless without a phrase book and he could not read a French newspaper satisfactorily).

Particularly important, however, is the fact that by the very nature of its ease of learning and its international character it is democratic at its core. If democracy is something which represents a value toward which we in the foundational studies wish to direct our attention, then Esperanto is the sort of language which should be considered as a second, transcendent language, common to all, under which true pluralism of language could flourish.

There are, of course, a number of disadvantages to consider: (a) Esperanto is extremely limited in its use throughout the world today in terms of the number of people occupying our planet; (b) however perfect a means of communication may be in the abstract, its very neutrality, its lack of a homeland, its lack of a culture, tend to cut it off from just that insight into national character, history, and literature which contributes in large measure to both the value and fascination associated with the study of a foreign language (26); and (c) the challenge which could be mounted against the view that adoption of a transcendent language such as Esperanto would lead eventually to a stable, peaceful world.

In my judgement, however, the arguments in favor of establishing such a language, its political neutrality, its absolute ease of learning, its likely impact on peace, its effect on international trade and travel, and its likely sparing of millions of young people and teachers of the hopeless drudgery which culminates in a modicum of language ability, all lead to the quite irrefutable conclusion that Esperanto or another transcendent language ought to be internationally adopted and stressed in schools around the world as a second language for all students to learn.

What Might be Done to Bring About the Adoption of ESPERANTO or Another Transcendent Language in Our Schools?

First we need to identify the reasons why we currently emphasize foreign language instruction in our schools. Five significant reasons are often suggested: (1) we wish to have our children and youth learn the literature of another country by learning to read in a particular foreign language; (2) we feel that in order

to appreciate the culture of another country we must encourage a person to learn another language; (3) business and industry want particular foreign languages taught so as to enhance the future efficiency and effectiveness of employees assigned to overseas locations; (4) some feel that learning a particular foreign language is necessary to learn self-discipline, to strengthen the faculties of the mind, assuming thereby that learning such a language is indeed a trying and difficult process; and (5) we emphasize the learning of a language to enable people to communicate, to engage in dialogue with one another.

Of these reasons I would argue that the last, communicating with people, constitutes the most important aim for all of us. While I do not mitigate the value of knowing a bit a literature and acquiring some capacity to appreciate another culture, I have seen few persons who have studied and mastered a foreign language enough to have acquired much understanding and appreciation of the culture of the nationality of the language they have studied, and even less ability among such persons to identify and pursue the study of literature of merit produced by that culture. Further, I have witnessed a rapid and almost complete loss of competency by people who have devoted years to the language they studied. All of which raises in my mind the need for us to reconsider these reasons for language instruction and to focus on the one purpose which, above all the others, seems to me to compel our attention, conversation.

Esperanto has all the qualities of a language which can enable one to begin conversing and writing after only a limited amount of formal instruction. Quite naturally full development of one's capabilities would take longer, but the initial start is relatively simple, and can lead to exhilerating encounters with others who have worked with this language. Let me conclude then by considering what might be done to bring about the learning of Esperanto or another transcendent language.

1. Important professional organizations, AESA, AERA, ASCD, Philosophy of Education Society, John Dewey Society, those engaged in curriculum theorizing and educational theory building, ought to commence study, individually and collectively

through committees and commissions, of the need for a transcendent, universal language. If I have appeared to stress Esperanto as the language which should be considered most seriously, it is only because I wish to emphasize that at least one very solid base has already been constructed for our use. Perhaps another constructed language would be superior. But we ought not get bogged down in the need to create when something of enormous potential has already been generated.

2. Legislators at the national level and the leadership of the highest levels of our government, particularly the Offices of Education and of State should be encouraged to support a move to have a viable, transcendent language taught as a second languge to all students throughout our country. Federal money should be budgeted and made available to states to pursue the achievement of this end. There is little doublt that when we want to achieve something really significant in any realm of our society we need dynamic leadership from the very highest offices of government.

In addition, we must encourage the political leaders and top-level decision-makers in countries throughout the world, as well as the U.N. itself, to encourage the teaching of a transcendent language as a second required language in all their schools, and we should encourage its use in every branch of international relations.

Earlier I mentioned Governor Cuomo's suggestion that Mr. Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev engage in a 'grand dialogue' over television for all the world to witness. In making his suggestion Mr. Cuomo was quoted as saying "why shouldn't the people of both these great countries be hearing their leaders address these questions?" (27) Yes, why should we not hear? But, more than that, why should we and everyone else not have a language that all could understand in such circumstances. We ought not be subjected to the need for translation to make such an event possible. Who knows how much feeling and meaning inadvertently is lost in such a process?

3. Critical theorists within the foundations field need to consider the implicit discrimination against language minorities when only a few of the world's languages are used in official circles. Clearly something is lost in translation, though

this is a much under-studied phenomenon, with no one able to tell what that degree of loss might be. Surely it is conceivable that the loss might be as much in bitterness and resentment because of the need for the minority linguistic population to learn and employ, or be subjected to rule by, a dominant linguistic elite as it would be in the misinformation transmitted through the translation process. While our critical theorists have been correctly and tellingly directing their attention at the base-superstructure analysis of our American society, at the taken-for-granted aspects of our society resulting from the uncritical employment of language, there is much to be done to transform our people into globally conscious individuals through the use of a transcendent language, perhaps more so in a realizable way then through this on-going neo-Marxist critique of our schools and their outcomes.

4. Foreign language instructors in the lower schools as well as the professors of foreign language at the college and university levels need to reexamine their views relative to a planned, artificial, neutral, transcendent language. For the most part they have been either simply silent, unaware of the need for such a language or, in some cases, antagonistic and adversarial about the matter. Whatever the reason, it is incumbent upon those working in the language field to become far more recepetive to the need for a transcendent language by all graduates of high schools and colleges.

5. Schools, colleges and departments of education need to expose their prospective teacher and administrator candidates to artificial language, make them aware of the value of such language to themselves and their prospective students, and encourage all prospective school workers to acquire competency in a transcendent language.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that the study of particular national languages would continue to be pursued by those with the aptitude and the need for them. But, for the many who will be engaged in foreign travel, who will encounter people from other cultures here in the United States in increasing numbers, for a world that

is becoming so interdependent and so able to communicate through enormous distances, that the possession of a common, universal language, one easily learned, with clear, unambiguous rules of grammar, available to people everywhere, would enable persons around the world to acquire access to the sort of human dignity which all of us proclaim to be a right of persons in every realm of life. Apartheid, as I indicated earlier, is considered a gross abuse of humankind by all of us; the continued use of a few national languages because they seem to have powerful 'carrying power' can be just as abusive of human rights, perhaps more so because of the subtlety of the discrimination. For that reason, if for no other, we need to pursue the sort of political equality via language which we continuously assert to be the right of people everywhere.

As Pei so presciently pointed out years ago, "there are few things to which we can point with pride as we say to our children: 'we leave you this product of our genius, and we assure you that it can work only for your welfare and happiness...' an international language differs from the vast majority of doubtful collective heritages passed on by one generation to another in this important respect: it can do good, but it cannot possibly do harm. It is only a useful tool, like the international postage system, or, better yet, like language itself...no nation... bars the teaching of foreign languages in its schools...many make such study compulsory. Here it would be a question of making one 'foreign' language compulsory, with all others left to the option of the students, or to the special requirements of a course of study." (28)

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